

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 7184

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OREP (COLEL SIMON)

SUBJ: CODEL SIMON VISIT TO DAMASCUS

1. DURING 24-HOURN VISIT TO DAMASCUS NOVEMBER 17-18, CODEL SIMON, ACCOMPANIED BY BUDGET COMMITTEE STAFF MEMBER STOR., MET WITH SPEAKER OF PEOPLE'S COUNCIL HALABY, DEPFONMIN AL KHANI, PALESTINIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL CHAIRMAN FAHHUM, HEAD OF JEWISH COMMUNITY TOUTAH AND FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM. CODEL'S ARRIVAL COINCIDED WITH DEPARTURE OF PRESIDENT SADAT FROM DAMASCUS AND FOCUS OF MOST CONVERSATIONS WAS ON SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN REACTION TO SADAT'S FORTHCOMING VISIT TO JERUSALEM.

2. SPEAKER OF THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL HALABY MADE ROUTINE CRITICISM OF US SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL AND TRADITIONAL PRESENTATION OF SYRIAN POSITION THAT PRINCIPLES OF LEACE WERE WITHDRAWAL TO 1967 LINES, THE RIGHTS OF PALESTINIANS TO ESTABLISH A STATE AND THEIR RETRUN OR COMPENSATION FOR LOST PROPERTIES. TERMING ZIONISM EXPANSIONIST, HALABY SOUGHT TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN SYRIA'S HOSTILITY TO ZIONISM AND ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD JEWS.

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RE GENEVA, HALABY HOPED US WOULD PLAY POSITIVE ROLE, KEEPING ISRAEL FROM TURNING AGREED-UPON JOINT ARAB DELEGATION INTO MERE FACADE AND USING ONLY GEOGRAPHIC SUBCOMMITTEES FOR SUBSTANTIVE NEGOTIATIONS. COMMENTING ON SADAT'S VISIT, HALABY EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE AMBIVALENCE. NOTED IF VISIT SUCCEDED IN UNCOVERING TRUE CONDITIONS FOR PEACE THEN, AS BEGIN HAS AID, "PEACE CAN

COME NOT IN DAYS

BUT IN HOURS." ON OTHER HAND, HALABY
DESCRIBED VISIT AS A DELUSION WHICH RISKED PROLONGING
THE OCCUPATION OF ARAB LANDS.

3. CODEL THEN SPENT HOUR WITH DEPFONMIN AL KHANI
WHO MADE HIGHLY EMOTIONAL PRESENTATION ABOUT SADAT'S
BETRAYAL OF ARAB CAUSE. CONTRASTING SADAT'S LEADER-
SHIP WITH THAT OF NASSER, AL KHANI SAID SADAT HAD PROVED
A LEADER OF INFINITELY LESS STATURE AND HAD DISAPPOINTED
ALL ARABS. AL KHANI EXCUSED HIMSELF AT SEVERAL POINTS
IN CONVERSATION FOR BECOMING EMOTIONAL, NOTING THAT HE
SIMPLY HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO ACCEPT SADAT'S BREAKING
RANKS WITH HIS FELLOW ARABS.

4. PALESTININE NATIONAL COUNCIL CHAIRMAN KHALID FAHHUM
WAS MORE RESTRAINED IN HIS CRITICISM OF SADAT'S VIEW,
DESCRIBING IT AS A MANEUVER WHICH FAHHUM DOUBTED WOULD
PAY OFF. CODEL FOUND FAHHUM CYNICAL ABOUT WHETHER
ARAB GOVERNMENTS, PARTICULARLY EGYPT AND JORDAN -- BUT
EVEN SYRIA -- WHEN THE CHIPS WERE DOWN WOULD SUPPORT
AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE. HE HIMSELF HOPED
FOR A STATE WHERE PALESTINIANS WOULD HAVE THEIR OWN
PASSPORTS WHILE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEFENSE AND FOREIGN
AFFAIRS WOULD REST WITH AMMAN BUT WITH PERHAPS SYRIA AS
WELL IF A FEDERAL RELATIONSHIP CAN BE DEVELOPED BETWEEN
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DAMASCUS AND AMMAN. OBSERVING THAT HUSSAIN WILL NOT
LIVE FOREVER, FAHHUM FORESAW THE EVENTUAL UNITY OF THE
EAST AND WEST BANKS.

5. CODEL ASKED FAHHUM WHETHER ASSURANCES COULD BE PRO-
VIDED THAT TERRORISTS WOULD NOT DOMINATE THE PLO SHOULD
" EVENTUALLY CONTROL ITS OWN TERRITORIAL ENTITY.
FAHHUM SAID THIS WOULD NOT BE A REAL PROBLEM, CLAIMING
THAT 95 PERCENT OF THE PALESTINIANS SHUNNED TERRORISM WHILE
THE 5 PERCENT WHO ARE ACTIVISTS WERE SUPPORTED BY ARAB COUNTRIES
WHO WOULD CEASE THEIR SUPPORT ONCE INDEPENDENCE WAS
ACHIEVED. HE NOTED THAT TERRORISM ALSO WOULD BE
CONTROLLED BY A COMBINATION OF JORDANIAN AND SYRIAN
MILITARY MEASURES.

6. DISCUSSING FINANCIAL VIABILITY OF THE FUTURE STATE,
FAHHUM SAID THAT REMITTANCES AND MONIES RECEIVED IN
COMPENSATION FOR PROPERTIES LOST BY PALESTINIAN REFUGEES
WOULD CONSTITUTE THE MAJOR PART OF THE ENTITY'S
FUNDING.

7. CODEL MET BRIEFLY WITH LEADER OF SYRIAN JEWISH COM-

MUNITY SALIM TOUTAH WHO REPEATED FAMILIAR POSITION THAT CONDITIONS OF JEWISH COMMUNITY HAD GREATLY IMPROVED UNDER ASSAD'S RULE AND THT HIS PRINCIPAL PREOCCUPATIONS WERE FOREIGN TRAVEL FOR SYRIAN JEWS AND FINDING SOLUTION FOR PROBLEM OF UNMARRIED WOMEN IN COMMUNITY. TOUTAH WAS JOINED BY MAURICE NOSSAIRI WHO GAVE CODEL LESS OPTIMISTIC READING OF COMMUNITY'S STATUS, ASSERTING THERE WAS NO GUARANTEE PRESENT CONDITIONS WOULD CONTINUE AND THAT MANY MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY HOPED DEPART SYRIA AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

8. MEETING WITH FONMIN KHADDAM HAS BEEN REPORTED SEPARATELY (DAMASCUS 7152). IN ESSENCE, FONMIN SEVERELY CRITICIZED KVAT'S DECISION TO VISIT JERUSALE. CONFIDENTIAL

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HE ASSERTED SADAT WAS POLITICALLY FINISHED BOTH IN HIS OWN COUNTRY AND AS AN ARAB LEADER. HE PREDICTED SADAT'S VISIT WILL CAUSE ADDITIONAL OBSTACLES ON THE ROAD TO GENEVA BY RENDERING ISRAEL MORE OBSTINATE OVER NEGOTIATIONS. KHADDAM REJECTED CODEL'S ARGUEMENT RE IMPORTANT EFFECT SADAT VISIT WILL HAVE ON AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION, CLAIMING THIS OTUWEIGHED BY LESS OF HIS POLITICAL BASE AT HOME. KHADDAM, HOWEVER, DID MAKE A NUMBER OF ASSERTIONS ABOUT SYRIA'S READINESS TO NEGOTIATE AT GENEVA, GIVING EVIDENCE THEREBY THAT ONE OF THE FIRST RESULTS OF SADAT'S DETERMINATION TO VISIT ISRAEL HAS BEEN TO ELICIT A MORE FORTHCOMING SYRIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PEACE PROCESS.

9. AT AMBASSADOR'S DINNER THAT EVENING, CODEL HAD OPPORTUNITY TO MEET VARIETY OF SYRIANS INCLUDING ONE RESERVE MEMBER OF SYRIAN BAATH PARTY'S NATIONAL COMMAND, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL, AND OTHER BAATH PERSONALITIES. HIS EXCHANGES WITH THAT GROUP ELICITED CONSIDERABLY GREATER INTEREST IN EFFECT SADAT VISIT WILL HAVE ON AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION AND POTENTIALLY BENEFICIAL RESULTS THIS IN TURN WILL HAVE ON PEACE PROCESS.

10. CODEL CLEARED THIS MESSAGE PRIOR DEPARTURE. MURPHY

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